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MAKE ROOM FOR WHAT YOU LOVE

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Take It to Heart

Your home should be your sanctuary, your safe haven in this crazy world. It should be inspired by what you love, the memories you've made, and the people you cherish. These lovely sentiments may describe the home you already live in, or at least the place you envision when you picture the dwelling of your dreams. Certainly you want your home to feel comfortable and welcoming, like a warm hug on a chilly day or a refreshing cool drink on a hot summer afternoon.

Whatever our style, our home should be life giving and soul refreshing, a soft spot to land on a hard day and a beautiful place to recharge and rejuvenate. The things we bring into our home can be a reflection of who we are and the life we live.

While a brand-new, empty house may be as inspiring as an artist's canvas, excess white space never feels quite cozy enough until it has memories and creature comforts that invite you to nestle into that place called home. A house filled with curiosities and treasures collected over time, layered with character and expressing personal style, can be so inspiring, endlessly interesting, and warmly charming and inviting.

But somehow in our quest to make ourselves at home, things multiply, and the chaos of living can overwhelm and overshadow the very sense of sanctuary we want to create. We begin wasting precious hours of our life trying to wrangle unwieldy hangers from our overstuffed closets and replacing lost tools because we can no longer find what we need among miscellaneous piles. Soon we become discontented with what we have, and the place we live in is no longer our sanctuary. It's

now a storage room where we have become caretakers of stuff and managers of transient things.

If you picked up this book, I'm guessing many of the things you longed for in a home have been lost somewhere deep in the clutter and chaos of day-to-day living. Things you have collected, once loved, or saved just in case have been set aside for someday until they eventually have clouded the vision and hope you once had for the peaceful ambience of your home. I've been there too.

The chaos in our physical world can reflect and even alter the state of our mood, body, mind, and spirit.

I remember a season in my life when I was a young mom and struggled for a short period with debilitating anxiety attacks. While it was difficult to go through some of those dark times, something good came of it that has stuck with me. I became more aware that the state of my outer world was intertwined with how I felt in my inner world, and vice versa. Each part of my life impacted the other.

While I can't always control everything that goes awry in my life, I discovered that there were many things I could do to better manage some things that impacted me. I needed to keep first things first, not only endeavoring to keep my inner soul in order, but also work on refocusing my homemaking priorities and ways of living at home.

I've always loved houses and enjoyed taking care of my surroundings. It was in that season of inner chaos that I began to be more intentional about my habits in my home. If my outer world could affect me so deeply, I was going to invest myself in the things I could better control. I started to make some changes in my approach with my home and life that, little by little, dramatically changed how I felt. My house is still a work in progress, and so am I. But by assessing what worked and didn't work, over the years I've overcome some of my previously ingrained habits and ways of thinking that had kept me perpetually feeling disorganized.

I'm excited to share some of these insights with you on how I started to reset my house and life. I'm sharing not as someone who was born

organized, but as someone who has worked hard to overcome the fact that I was not.

In any chaotic season, everything starts to feel overcrowded and out of control, and we cannot see beauty even if it is right in front of us. Clutter suffocates the white space, crowding out the room we need for our souls to breathe and our creativity to thrive. An excess of things will threaten to control your time, taunt you in your sleep, and turn you into a slave of the maintenance of your home and keeper of your stuff. Clutter is a stealer of joy and an enemy of contentment. Your home should breathe happiness into your family's story, not slowly suck the life out of you.

Hope is easily lost amid growing piles of unknown, undone, incomplete projects and “saving it for another day” stuff. You no longer have time for what you love, let alone space to bring what you love into your life.

Yet while your home may not even be close to the peaceful oasis of your dreams, there's hope. It can be more perfect for you if you are willing and ready to step off the crazy cycle of cluttered living and take back control.

If much of your life feels as if it is spiraling into chaos, it's time to take the first steps to regain your sanity. You've probably heard that if you keep repeating the same action over and over again and don't like the result, you need to change your approach. That is true with your home too. You need to get off that merry-go-round and push the reset button.

As you read through this book and discover how to transform your thinking and resulting actions, I hope you will begin to see your home differently. I think you'll find that your ability to transform your home—inside and out, once and for all—is within your reach. Even if you have felt that you are not naturally organized, or if you have trouble making decisions for what to keep or let go of, or if you struggle with homemaking in general, my hope is that this book will encourage you that your home can be transformed.

This is likely not your first attempt at transforming your home.

Don't worry if you have felt inspired for periods of time in the past, only to revert back to the way you lived before. This time you will start to look at your home in a new way and see your life from a new perspective. Once you start this journey toward a more orderly life, you'll never want to go back because not only will your home change in wonderful ways, but you will too.

Perhaps you've read books on decluttering or maybe even spent weeks stressing out over making decisions about what to keep or give away. You might have printed out all the housekeeping checklists and bought all the bins to get organized and tried to follow all the rules. Maybe you've even made a lot of progress but are still not where you want to be. Or maybe you've given up and are hoping for renewed inspiration.

The fact that you've made some attempts to declutter in the past shows that your heart's desire is to find a greater sense of peace in your home. The heart is the perfect starting point. But with that desire you need to add a perspective on the type of changes your heart can embrace. When your heart is on board, you'll more naturally gravitate to new habits as a way of living long after you've highlighted tips and dog-eared the last pages of this book.

If you are like me, you may be pretty good at stuffing things into closets to avoid decisions about what to do with them. Maybe your home actually *looks* okay—certainly to everyone else it appears just fine—but you know that behind closet doors and in storage areas your secret shame is hidden. You have too much stuff, whether it fills your living room or your garage or your closets. You don't feel in control of your home. Instead, your home controls you and your emotions.

There's no shame here, no matter what your home looks like. Whatever your current struggle with stuff is, we are in this together because the state of our home matters. You are my people. Together we will learn to create a home that can transform how we live, enhance how we feel, and will expand our capacity to live out and embrace what we truly love.

These ideas will work for you whether your house is big or small,

rented or owned, full of children or just you. We'll discuss methods and come up with potential strategies to rid your home of the clutter. Rest assured, you will make progress in decluttering and organizing your home. But the real goal isn't to plow through quickly to clear out your home and move on with life as it was, only with a view that is a little bit emptier or airier than it was before. There's more to it than empty surfaces and tidy closets.

My desire is to help you nurture a deeper sense of what home means to you so you can live in it with confidence. I want to inspire you to be more decisive so you can make more room for what you really love, both in your home and in the life you lead. My goal is that you will make more room for the things you love as an ongoing way of living, not as a one-time epic decluttering event (although if you can set aside a few months to jump-start this process, all the better!).

If you only remember one thing from our time together, I hope it will be that you become more aware of the decisions you make every day. Those subconscious decisions that keep your home in a state of perpetual disorder can be turned around to help you create the kind of home you dream about.

Creating a home is a journey, and decluttering what you no longer need is only part of the story. I want you to transform the way it feels to be there. I want you to be inspired by what you see around you so you can spend more time *being* who you are and with the people you love, and less time being enslaved to stuff you don't need in your life. I believe how you care for your home can and will inspire your life and impact how you live.

The journey of home transformation should be a gift you are excited to give yourself. You deserve to have a peaceful, orderly, tidy home. Clutter is what weighs you down, distracts, and distances you from the things you dream about. A decluttered home will inspire your life.

Fortunately, while creating a home you really love is a lifelong experience, overwhelming clutter and disorder won't be something you will deal with forever. There will be an end to the sense of this being a drawn-out battle and the beginning of a new way of finding joy at

home. Clutter will no longer drag you down and defeat you because you will see it for what it is—an intruder that destroys the serenity of your home.

How about a little visual to inspire you to defeat and outsmart the clutter? Whether or not you are a Dave Ramsey fan, you may have heard the famous financial guru use the phrase *gazelle intensity* to describe the determination by which you should be focused on getting out of debt. Why would an animal like a gazelle have anything to do with succeeding at finances, let alone getting organized?

To survive, gazelles have to outsmart a cheetah, the fastest animal on earth. Cheetahs can accelerate faster than a sports car, so outrunning them seems nearly impossible. But gazelles are smart. They have learned that a cheetah's speed is limited to running in a straight line. A gazelle simply has to bob and weave until the cheetah gets tired and gives up the fight. Who knew a gazelle could be so clever?

So while Dave refers to a gazelle as a reminder of the intensity needed to succeed in getting out of debt and fight off debt collectors, my daughters (who share my love for decluttering) and I have long hijacked the gazelle as a humorous mascot to cheer us on in our mission to outsmart clutter and reach our goals. Whenever we feel as if we have a task that seems insurmountable, we say we have to put our gazelle face on and do this thing.

Life hands us a lot of challenges and curveballs in our journey to create a sanctuary, so we have to be able to navigate our way through the obstacles to get where we want to be. What are we waiting for? Let's get our gazelle face on and do this.

Get on the Mission

The difficulty in life is the choice.

GEORGE MOORE

The Things.

We might need these things.

I inherited these things.

I love this thing.

I paid good money for these things.

I just can't decide what to do with these things.

I need to save all the things, just in case.

I remember when my kids wore all these things.

My grandma gave me this thing.

My husband doesn't want me to get rid of these things.

Things broke and I need to fix them. Someday.

I plan to return things.

Someone might need this thing.

These things might fit again someday.

I remember when we bought these things.

These things were so expensive.

I'm hanging on to these things.

I am going to paint or recover these things.

*I can't find the other part of this thing.
I might be able to repurpose this thing.
I would use these things, but I can never find them.*

Sometimes things start to feel a bit cozier around our house than we intend. Now, I'm all for cozy rooms, but it's quite possible we rationalize our love for so many things and find a way to squeeze them all in so tightly that eventually we will not have room to breathe. (I don't know, but I think breathing just might need to be at the top of our priority list. Wouldn't ya say?)

I remember inviting people over for a party when my husband and I were first married. Moments before our guests arrived at our little condo, I was sweating profusely as I tried to make room for them by cramming all of our clutter, dishes, and piles of dirty laundry into our tiny laundry closet and shutting the door before anyone arrived. The truth is, I wasn't actually trying to make room for the guests. I was trying to hide my secret shame. I had no idea how to keep up a house, and that was the best I could do to make my home reflect what I wanted it to be, a peaceful and welcoming sanctuary.

My stress over piles of stuff wasn't about wanting to impress my guests. I mean, we all have laundry, right? I just wanted the ambience of my home to make it possible for me to enjoy some time with friends. For the life of me, I couldn't figure out how one young couple could create so much chaos.

With a job and a baby on the way, I consoled myself with the fact that I didn't have endless energy to spend working on my home. But I also didn't understand why my home was taking so much of my time and why I had so little to show for the effort. I simply wanted to invite people over, enjoy life, and spend time with people I cared about. I didn't want to spend my time hiding clutter—but more than that, I really didn't like seeing it, either.

Years went by, and as our family grew, so did our belongings. I always felt behind—or at least that I wasn't getting ahead. I'd get one room pulled together, and another would fall apart. I would start

projects with big intentions of finishing them, and then trip on them for months before I finally gave up and stuffed everything in a closet.

Thankfully, I stumbled on a thought that changed everything. It was really quite simple, actually. I couldn't believe I hadn't thought that thought before! Once I started to think of it, it made perfect sense.

In order to manage my home and get control of my stuff, I didn't need to work harder or stay up later. I didn't necessarily even need a better household organization manual. I simply needed to start *becoming more decisive about everything*.

Say what? That was it? I didn't just need a better container?

I don't know why it hadn't occurred to me before, but my chronic indecision and resulting procrastination was making me feel paralyzed. I was stuck with clutter. I couldn't move ahead on getting rid of it or getting my home better organized because I couldn't even make a simple decision or follow through with the how or what or when or why. Indecision, in so many ways, was preventing me from feeling in control all those years.

If I could learn how to make more efficient decisions and even be more decisive about what really mattered to me when it came to my home, I could be more efficient! It was worth a try, and as it turns out, new habits changed me—and my house.

Make Domino Decisions

You know how it goes. You are really tired at the end of the day, so you decide to save the dinner cleanup or laundry for another day. But tomorrow comes, and you don't want to do it then, either. I mean, do we really ever say enthusiastically, "YAY! I'm so exhausted. I can't wait to do housework!"

Or maybe you keep passing a pile of stuff in a corner of the room, but when you decide to finally do something about it, you are reminded why it's there. It's because you really don't know what to do with it, so you decide to leave it and ignore it. Or you get creative and move the pile to a new place where you don't have to see it every day! Maybe you stuff it in a closet or toss it in the garage for when you'll "have more

time” to think about it. Oh, how I relate! Making a decision can be hard, or tiring, or just too much to deal with right now.

Have you ever thought about the fact that by delaying a decision on something, you actually (inadvertently) still make a decision? That sounds confusing, perhaps, but the truth is that each action we take throughout the day at home (even a small or delayed action) will either increase the clutter and chaos or move us closer toward order and beauty.

When we postpone an action or decision about anything, from cleaning up the kitchen to where to put belongings or what we keep or get rid of, we are making the decision to feel overwhelmed later. We probably don't think of it that way in the moment; we actually feel the opposite might be true. If you are like me, you probably think postponing a decision will bring more clarity to the situation or more energy for the task later. And in many decisions we face in life, that reasoning may be true.

But the reality is that when it comes to making simple decisions about tasks and objects around our home, delaying the decision doesn't often contribute to the peace we long for. It actually creates the opposite result.

Choosing to be indecisive and not taking the right action results in a pileup of indecisive moments we call clutter.

Let's think about that for a moment.

Look around your home at all the piles and disorder. Look at the surfaces. Open the drawers. Walk around the garage. Look in closets. What is all that stuff? Who put it there? Why is it there? How do you feel when you see all that clutter? Every one of those things that doesn't belong or is in excess likely represents a moment in time where you or someone in your home made a decision in favor of clutter.

Postponing a decision to eliminate clutter *automatically* creates more of the disorder we are trying to escape. Decisions we make about our belongings are like dominoes. They will set off a series of other

actions that will either keep our home in *order* or *disorder*. We make the choice with a decision about which way the dominoes will fall whether we intend to or not.

Perhaps postponing decisions is the root of your struggle, as it is mine. I've always been indecisive. When we go out to a restaurant, I take one look at the menu, and if there are more than ten options, I want someone else to decide what I should order (or at least help me narrow down the choices). Too many options induce anxiety. I might ask everyone at the table what they are ordering before I can make a decision for myself. I might ask my husband to order for me. Better yet, I'll find someone to split entrées with me so we can order two things and share them! That way I don't have to decide between two options. I can have my cake and eat it too, so to speak.

I guess I don't want to miss out on the perfect choice when I'm paying for dinner out. I definitely don't want to make a wrong choice, so I feel better leaving those scary and life-altering decisions, such as "the special roast beef dinner or manager's favorite pasta primavera," to someone else. Because decisions like that are big responsibilities.

I mean, now that I've admitted it, doesn't it sound ridiculous? It's just ROAST BEEF or PASTA, right? Either way, I'll eat. First-world dilemmas, I guess.

My indecision isn't limited to food choices. When I travel, I can't decide what to wear. So I bring all the things. All the accessories. All the shoes. I can't decide if I should go casual or dressy, so I bring both. I lug a giant suitcase and carry-on bag with me across the country because I feel I need options and don't want to commit to the wrong choice—yet it's the *options* that do me in. The more I have to choose from, the more indecisive and overwhelmed I am once I arrive at my destination. I usually choose dressy when everyone else chooses casual or vice versa, making me doubt my own judgment. Why is making a firm decision and feeling good about it so hard for me?

Like me, you may have found it difficult to make even simple decisions about what to do with your home. For most of my life, I have struggled with what to buy, what to keep, and what to let go of, so I

postponed decisions and created more disorder. Possessions can overwhelm. Choices can paralyze. Decisions can be unnerving.

Even though I was able to run a business and take care of my family, when I used to come face-to-face with a decision about what to do with almost *anything random in my possession*, if no one was around to tell me what to do with it, I became paralyzed.

Perfectionists often struggle with decisions because while they might want a perfect solution, they aren't sure yet what that solution would be, and they may not have time to think about it just then, so they delay action.

Whenever I couldn't decide what to do with something right there on the spot, it felt safer to just *not decide* so I could move on with the day. I would put off tasks like cleaning out a linen closet because I didn't want to deal with all of the decisions that would be involved.

When I first realized that the root of feeling perpetually disorganized at home was my inability to make necessary decisions in a timely matter, it was as if a lightbulb went off in my head. I was causing my own crazy.

For years I had thought an orderly home would naturally be the result of learning the tricks of how to organize things, doing the hard work of color-coding everything, and definitely becoming more efficient at managing all the stuff with the proper techniques for labeling, cataloging, folding, and filing everything in a neat and tidy way.

But as helpful as each of those techniques was, and as hard as I tried, they didn't get me off the crazy cycle of clutter and disorder for long. Before I could truly succeed at creating the home I dreamed about and maintain it for the long haul, I had to start at the *beginning* by laying the right foundation of purpose that stirred my heart so I could become more resolute in my decision making. I had to first be *deliberate* about embracing key principles and goals I had for my home.

Changing my ways and creating a home I loved wasn't just about paring down until perhaps I wouldn't have hardly any stuff at all (although I'll admit at times that sounded tempting!). The truth is, I didn't want to be a minimalist with empty surfaces and barren closets. I love to be surrounded by pretty things and memories of our family and

life together. I like clothes. I love dishes and books. I love furniture and accessories. I happen to feel that the existence of a manageable amount of happy things we love will breathe life and soul into where we live.

I want just the right amount of stuff. Not too much, not too little.

Clutter is the result of poor decision making. Many faulty decisions will compound, literally piling up like the clutter they create, causing the chaos you live in. So to break that crazy cycle of clutter, we need to begin by being more decisive about what we invite into our home and life and ruthless about what we need to edit out.

When we start to think differently, we act differently and end up with different results. The key is to start to think in a way that our heart understands, so we can change our results from the inside out.

How can we be surrounded by what we love, but be free of the clutter that weighs us down?

Conquer the Crazy Cycle

In interior decorating, my daughters and I are well aware that it just takes *one wrong decision* to lead everything else in the design astray. When we see a room gone wrong or we make a mistake on a project, we amuse ourselves with the fact that it only took *one false move* for that to happen.

One false move is also what starts off the crazy cycle of frustration, additional expense, clutter, or disorganization. The domino effect is powerful.

Our deliberate or even inadvertent daily decisions can produce an undesirable domino effect that begins to propel us, and our home, into disorder. But what if we were able to harness the domino concept in a way that works *for* us rather than *against* us? What if keeping an orderly home wasn't actually more work at all, but just a matter of making better decisions that will transform our home?

Let's consider this concept in reverse.

If it just takes one *false* move to be the first domino to knock over the rest in a heap of chaos and calamity, even one *positive* move can be the domino to easily inspire habits and successes, knocking others over one by one in the *right* direction.

For someone as indecisive as I was, this was an interesting and freeing thought. My indecision was causing my disorder. I had been making home-altering decisions daily without even realizing it. As long as I could learn to make better decisions about my stuff every day, I would be well on my way to a more orderly and beautiful home.

Domino decisions actually made sense to me, as I had already learned the value of incorporating domino *habits* in my home.

Many years ago, I started making my bed every morning. At first it felt counterproductive. I mean, why make a bed if you are just going to climb back in it at night, right? But much to my surprise, making the bed eventually became a domino habit for me, leading to other housekeeping successes throughout the day.

If I made my bed every day without fail, it was the first domino that led to new positive choices and actions throughout the day. A pretty bed reminded me to open my shades in the morning to let the sunlight in. Once the shades were open, it felt brighter and cheerier in the room, so I was inspired to keep my nightstand and dresser top tidy. With a freshly made bed and clear surfaces in the room, I resisted piling laundry or other stuff all over the bed. Instead, I took a few moments to fold and put things away so my bed could stay pretty all day.

Knowing the success of daily domino habits and how they had changed my daily routines in our home, it made sense to me that being more aware of productive decisions throughout the day would have the same positive domino effect on my home.

Domino habits have become part of the housekeeping routines I practice every day. I don't have to master every task to have a clean home, but the ones I do focus on every day inspire the rest so my home is clean enough on a regular basis. Likewise, the *decisions* I make every day about clutter and possessions become dominoes too and impact my home and life in positive ways.

At first it may seem hard to change when you are used to making decisions based on what feels easiest in the moment, but soon you'll become more focused on your goals and what you want for your home and life, so you'll start to think in a new way. It's simpler than you expect it to be. If you make a decision to let go of even one possession

you really don't need, your house will be less cluttered. The positive decision becomes easier!

Soon, as you go to set down that pile of papers on the kitchen counter because you don't feel like putting them in the recycling bin, you'll catch yourself and make a different decision. It might take 2.5 seconds longer to step over to the recycling bin, but you'll be aware that it's a better choice, and it will save you time and stress later. That choice becomes a domino decision because having fewer papers on the counter will affect other decisions in the day. Once you are aware of your tendency to be indecisive, you'll coach yourself through better decisions all day long until they become more natural. Try it!

*Here's a simple question to
ask yourself as you go about your day:*

*Will putting this item here add to the order
or disorder of this space?*

Make the right domino decision, and you'll find yourself acquiring a more productive habit. Instead of leaving your hair supplies and makeup on the bathroom counter when you leave for work, ask yourself if leaving those items there is contributing to *order* or *disorder*. Take a moment to toss them in the drawer!

Instead of throwing the clean laundry on the floor because you are too tired to deal with it at that moment, get in the habit of pausing to ask yourself if your action will create *order* or *disorder*. If it will only take a few minutes to fold and take it to the proper rooms, deal with it right away and enjoy less chaos later.

While I'm still learning, I've come a long way in how I make decisions. I more quickly recognize those moments when I am making the wrong decision about clutter or housekeeping, and I usually stop myself and make a better choice—or I at least come back right away and correct my mistake. I'll never go back to complete disorder because I know now that the right decisions every day change everything. (And if things do get a little out of hand, good decisions will easily get me back on course.)

Love It

Make tidying the kitchen a more enjoyable daily ritual. Set up a music player or phone so you can listen to your favorite music or enjoy podcasts as you clean. Have a delicious-smelling candle on the counter. Invest in pretty dish towels (fold or roll them in a wire basket on the counter by the sink), and set a brand-new dish-scrubbing brush in a pitcher.

Commit to the Right Mission

Have you ever started a decluttering project at your home, only to find that the mess eventually crept back in? Do you start projects and get partway through them, and then after a while lose interest? Me too.

We tend to get stuck and then disinterested, and we abandon our decluttering and organization projects because we lose sight of what we are doing and why we are doing it. It's hard work! Life gets in the way. Decluttering is not always as rewarding as we need it to be to keep our focus. If we become tired or are too busy or get sick, or a major life change disrupts our progress, it's no wonder we just give up and shove the remaining mess back into the closet. Right? Yeah, I know. I've done that hundreds of times.

So what's your real purpose in decluttering? The truth is, decluttering alone isn't necessarily going to bring long-term happiness. Certainly if you stick with it, you can declutter all the things, and theoretically you'll never have to declutter again as long as you never bring new things into the house. A decluttered house is a worthwhile goal, isn't it? Yes.

But why you are decluttering? Sure, there's a natural joy that will result in seeing an organized desk or a clean kitchen, and that is worth striving for. Celebrate those successes! But then what? What happens next?

I'm sure you are about to slug me because all you wanted to do was

set a goal to declutter the house, and now I'm suggesting that you plan what you'll do after that? Decluttering is a goal, but it isn't your *mission*.

When that goal is complete, and the closet is picture-perfect, what does that represent to you?

Decluttering can be like a diet. You can motivate yourself to stick to it long enough to lose your goal weight (or a decluttered closet, as the case might be), and then when you do reach your goal, you celebrate and proclaim you'll never go back to your old ways! You put on that new dress and look great—but often old habits creep back in, the pounds come back, and you have to start over again once you realize you have gotten off track. That's what we want to avoid with our home, right? We want to do this once and do it right.

But we don't want our new aspiration in life to make us so obsessed with perfection that we live in fear of bringing in anything new or restrict everyone to just owning one outfit at a time because, for Pete's sake, we don't want the house or the closet to return to the way it was.

No. Reaching perfection and trying to maintain it isn't the *mission* at all. I think that, as with any other goal in life, long-term success and happiness comes from embracing the bigger purpose so we change from the inside out. We want the outside results to be a reflection of our authentic inner work, so we truly love where we live and don't spend our life trying to figure out how to keep our house looking like a showplace.

What will a decluttered home mean to our life? What might it mean to our family? How will these changes in our perspective and how we manage our belongings influence our thinking, our sense of peace in the home, and success outside the home or in our career? Those questions start to lead us to our real purpose for why we are embarking on this journey.

We need to be thoughtful about our decluttering goals so we know where we are going. What are we doing, and why are we doing it?

While the obvious answer might be that we are doing this to declutter and organize our home so we can have clean closets and surfaces, it's the purpose for those short-term goals that will drive our success over the long haul.

When I started really getting serious about putting my house in order, it was because I was fed up with disorder. But more than that, I was tired of disorder standing in the way of everything I wanted for our life. I was determined to create the environment I wanted for my family and the ambience I needed in order to focus my attention on what mattered to me.

I was tired of just shuffling clutter from one room to the next. I was tired of organizing and reorganizing stuff. I was tired of wasting time on *stuff*! I had a bigger vision for my life. Honestly, clutter just felt like a ball and chain around my ankle. I wanted to make more room in our life for worthwhile things that are intangible, not just more stuff I had to manage.

I wanted a home that was more than just a place for us to organize stuff. I love pretty things and enjoy creating a home that is beautiful to me. But there was also more to it than just wanting a beautifully organized home. I wanted to create the right ambience and find the right balance of stuff so I wouldn't be distracted by clutter, but rather inspired to live a more intentional life.

I wanted to create more space *in between all that stuff* so there was more energy for what mattered most to me. Isn't that what you want too?

When I zeroed in on the bigger purpose of getting rid of stuff and why I was striving to create order out of chaos, something changed in me. I found it easier to have that gazelle intensity because I believed I was going somewhere significant with this. I was no longer a slave to stuff; I was learning to become a master of it. I was empowered to be more intentional every day.

Is your mission to create a perfect house? No. Let's just clear this up once and for all. Your home will never be perfect as long as you continue to live in it. Your goal should not be perfection; it should be to create a home that inspires you to great things. However, setting the bar higher, to better than it has been before, is more likely to bring you success than setting the bar too low. Every decision, no matter how small, will either steer your home toward your goals or away

from them. A mess distracts you; tidiness frees you to create the perfect home for you.

Here are some questions to ponder and perhaps journal about as you start to develop your own vision and sense of home:

- What do you really love but feel you never have enough time for?
- Describe your ideal home. What would it feel like?
- What words describe what your home feels like now?
- In the long term, what do you envision achieving in your life?
- How might the state of your home prevent or distract you from success in other goals?
- What inspires you to be happy at home?
- What kind of setting brings you peace?
- What colors feel energizing or soothing to you?
- Does your home reflect your style?
- What is one source of frustration you experience due to clutter?
- What activities bring laughter to your home?
- What would your life be like if your home was always clean and organized?
- What excuses do you seem to make over and over again when it comes to the state of your home?
- If you could start over with a clean slate, which room or closet would be the first you would want to see completely decluttered and beautified?

As you become more aware of what you love and what makes you happy at home, what inspires you to live out your dreams, and what makes you more aware of how your home might impact your life, it will become clearer to you what *you don't want* to invest in.

Do It Now

Keep track of your home goals, daily habits, and home inspiration with a three-ring notebook and plastic sleeves. You can also use folders to keep track of your inspiration photos, home goals, notes, and progress. Find downloads at makerroomforwhatyoulove.com.

I can pretty much bet you don't love disorder or clutter if you are reading this book. There is no doubt about it. Clutter makes functioning efficiently more challenging and makes maintaining your home more costly and time consuming. But imagine a space to breathe and relax in, to be surrounded only by people and things you truly love. That's inspiring, isn't it? That's the kind of house most of us truly dream about.

Your home should be a unique reflection of you and the family you love, and in order to design that space, you have to be honest with yourself about what kind of home you want to create and what it will take to get it.

What is standing in the way of the home you dream of?

Set goals for your home that will inspire you so you can become an effective decision maker in what matters most to you. In turn, you'll make more room for what you really love.

Set Foolproof Goals

If your home is starting to reflect to you that YOU must be a failure, don't let it discourage you with the lie that you are incapable of a beautiful, orderly home. Your home may feel like a failure if it's a disaster right now, but there's hope for you and your home. I know there is, and to help you along the way, I can let you in on my little tricks to make this process easier.

When I was finally fed up with disorder and wanted to transform my home top to bottom to be a peaceful retreat for my family in every way, I knew I needed to make some specific changes.

But before I found the right map, the road ahead felt so overwhelming. I didn't even know where to start. There were too many options! I thought I was too busy for progress. I couldn't decide how to proceed, so I procrastinated. I put off decisions until I had time to figure out the right plan and the perfect solutions.

Even attempts I DID make seemed to stall when the momentary thrill of the idea of organizing ALL THE THINGS ended. I needed a plan that would keep me going and help me to make the right decisions when I was tempted to revert to my old ways.

The reason why most of us fail at achieving our goals is not our lack of enthusiasm for them; it's that we don't have an actionable plan to get us there. It's clear our daily decisions are linked to our results. Think about these scenarios:

- When you can't find your keys or your shopping lists or your shoes because you didn't put them away, your day gets off to a rough start.
- You become cranky and crabby when dishes pile up in the sink. You are just too tired to wash all the crusty dishes from last night, so you go out to dinner three nights in a row and face those dishes for days on end.
- You want to redecorate, so you buy some new accessories. When you get home, you are flustered because you don't know where to put them. They end up collecting dust on a random table or in a closet with other things you don't know what to do with.
- You aren't able to find time for yourself or things you really love because you are too busy trying to keep up with a perpetually cluttered and messy home.
- You buy \$60 worth of craft supplies, and you never find time for crafting. Soon you realize you have collected enough craft supplies on your desk to open a small craft store, so you stash it somewhere out of the way. When your kids need craft supplies for a school project, you are

pumped to finally have a use for all that glitter. Unfortunately, now you can't find it for the life of you, so you have to buy another bottle.

- The piles of dirty clothes on the floor are just too overwhelming, so you feel you have to go shopping for something new to wear.
- You leave a stack of random things on the counter, and it multiplies when you aren't looking. Clearing off the piles later steals time away from your weekend.

Because our own choices are responsible for the disorder in the home, we need to get ourselves out of this fix!

I think of this as my foolproof cheat sheet for setting home goals because it's SMART! Smart, just like a gazelle, right? You may have heard of this acronym before for goal setting. I love it because it takes some of the mystery out of how to get from point A to point B.

We need to set goals that are:

S — Specific

M — Measurable

A — Achievable

R — Realistic

T — Time Limited

When I'm feeling all wishy-washy and indecisive about what to do next, it's so helpful to have someone else boss me around! In this case, my little cheat sheet gets me headed in the right direction every time. I hope it will help you too! Our goals need to be *specific* (get rid of old sweaters rather than just clean out the closet), *measurable* (I want to pare down to only five sweaters), *achievable* (a goal you can actually accomplish in the time frame you have), *realistic* (don't set a ridiculous goal), and *time limited* (set a timeline for steps and completion).

Let's say you want to start making better decisions in the area of

clutter prevention around your house. You can create a SMART goal for that! Your goal should be something like this: Every day this week, I will clear my desk of clutter at the end of the evening.

That is a SMART goal because it is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time limited.

Now let's say you really love decorating for Christmas, but you no longer enjoy heading up to the attic because you are so overwhelmed by the amount of decorations you have accumulated over the years. Your dream is to pare down and organize. This may seem like a daunting project you want to put off as long as possible, but creating actionable steps will help you achieve your goal. To take action on our goals, we use "reverse engineering," which is simply putting together the steps to the goal as a map to reach your destination.

First, let's set a SMART goal: *By Sunday night, I want to organize my holiday decor into just three bins by getting rid of everything I don't love or use.*

Now that I have a SMART goal, let's map out the action steps to achieve it:

1. Friday afternoon, I will bring all of my holiday bins to the living room and empty them in the middle of the floor.
2. I will set up three areas: one for things to give away, one for things I want to keep, and one for trash.
3. I will go through each ornament and decoration, keeping only what I still love and actually use and setting aside the rest to give away.
4. By Sunday afternoon, I will organize what I want to keep into no more than three bins, putting all three bins back into the attic. The empty bins will be stacked in the garage.
5. I'll take the trash out to the recycling area, and the items to give away will go immediately to my car to be dropped off Monday at the women's shelter.

By committing to being more decisive and more deliberate in our daily actions, we can start to transform our home into the one we dream about.

Now that you will be more aware that indecision every day invites disorder into your home, it's time to make some goals to kick the chaos out and make more room for what you really love!

What is a SMART goal you could work on this week?

Do It Now

What is one area of your home you've neglected because you just haven't yet committed to making decisions for that space? Let go of trying to find the perfect solution and just commit to a simple one! Take a small step forward with the time, money, and resources you currently have.

Pause, Reflect, and Act



Make Room

What is your mission? Brainstorm a list of reasons why you want to make changes in your home. Go deeper than the fact that you are just tired of clutter. What will a cleaner, tidier, less-cluttered space mean to your life? What goals might you be more inspired to accomplish? Write your reasons on a piece of paper and save it to inspire you.



Let It Go

What is “one false move” you’ve been making every day that sets off a crazy cycle for the rest of the day or week? Make a list of some unproductive domino habits you need to change. Perhaps you’ve been leaving dishes in the sink, not making the bed, leaving laundry in baskets, or putting piles of mail or papers in random places in the house. Let those habits go and see the difference!



Home Love Habit

Get in the habit of asking yourself this key question every day. (Perhaps type it out and tape it to every room in your house until it becomes ingrained in your thinking!) “Will putting this item here add to the *order* or *disorder* of this space?”